

2
UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL
21 May 1986

5 POST-MEDIA
BY DANA WALKER
WASHINGTON

The Reagan administration, weighing whether to prosecute two news organizations accused of publicizing state secrets, has repeatedly tried to intimidate the news media, a group representing reporters charged Wednesday.

The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press said the government made efforts from 1981 to the present to invade editorial privacy, restrict access to government information and impose prior restraint on news stories.

X The White House said Wednesday the CIA is analyzing a Washington Post report to determine if its disclosure of U.S. intelligence operations against the Soviets warrants prosecution. That action followed by two days a request by CIA Director William Casey that the Justice Department decide whether to prosecute NBC News for a similar report.

The Post and NBC News reports focused on alleged revelations by accused spy Ronald Pelton, now on trial in Baltimore on charges of revealing secret information about U.S. spying operations against the Soviets, including by American submarines in Soviet waters.

Jane Kirtley, executive director of the reporters committee, said the action is part of a pattern within the administration and may be part of a news media intimidation campaign.

The Post conceded Wednesday it did not print a story containing all the details it had of Pelton's alleged revelations to the Soviets, citing concern about legal retribution. It also revealed President Reagan himself asked the newspaper not to print the story.

"There is a trend that the administration has shown a greater desire to keep government information secret," Kirtley said. "Intimidating the media is the 'next best thing' to actual legal action, she said, citing more than 75 administration actions documented by her group of efforts to suppress the news media.

She said it is significant that legal action is now being considered because that has not been part of the past pattern.

"The Justice Department's articulated position in the past has been that it is reluctant to take action," she said. "I would hope they would not consider this to be the right case" to prosecute.

Casey's accusation against NBC followed his charge earlier this month that the Post, The New York Times, the Washington Times and Time and Newsweek magazines also had broken a 1950 law with reports about intercepted Libyan communications.

Two top officials, one at the State Department and another at the Pentagon, have been dismissed recently for passing classified information to reporters.

Other recent actions, according to the group, include:

NEW
Cable

2

-A White House complaint in February against ABC News for allowing a Soviet reporter prime time air time to discuss Reagan's televised speech on defense spending and the budget.

-A Justice Department memorandum in February supporting use of executive privilege to keep records of President Nixon secret.

-NASA in January impounding film of news organizations covering the fatal Challenger launch.

-Reagan in November requiring all government employees and contractors with high-level security clearances to submit to lie detector tests.